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Harvard returns historic daguerreotypes to Charleston

CHARLESTON, S.C. — In a watershed moment for historical justice and cultural repatriation, a set of 175-year-old daguerreotypes depicting enslaved individuals has officially returned to South Carolina. The images, including world-renowned portraits of a man named Renty and his daughter Delia, were transferred today from Harvard University's Peabody Museum to the International African American Museum (IAAM) in Charleston.

A Legacy of Exploitation

The photographs, known as the Zealy daguerreotypes, were commissioned in 1850 by Harvard biologist Louis Agassiz.

Agassiz, a proponent of the debunked theory of polygenism, used these images to support racist pseudoscience claiming Black people were biologically inferior. Renty and Delia were forced to pose shirtless and without consent, a degrading exercise designed to strip them of their humanity for "research specimens".

For nearly two centuries, these haunting images remained in Harvard's custody, often hidden in storage until their rediscovery in 1976.

The fight for "Papa Renty"

The repatriation follows a grueling seven-year legal battle led by Tamara Lanier, a Connecticut woman who identified Renty as her great-great-great-grandfather, whom she affectionately calls "Papa Renty". Lanier's quest began in 2010 after promising her dying mother she would trace their family tree back to its roots in South Carolina.

In 2019, Lanier sued Harvard for "wrongful seizure, possession, and expropriation" of the images. While the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court eventually ruled in 2022 that she did not have a legal property claim to the physical photos citing precedents that images belong to the photographer it did allow her to pursue damages for emotional distress.

The case concluded in an unprecedented settlement in May 2025, with Harvard agreeing to relinquish ownership of 15 daguerreotypes to the IAAM.

Returning to sacred ground

The choice of the International African American Museum as the new home for these artifacts is deeply symbolic. The museum is located at Gadsden's Wharf, the exact site where nearly half of all enslaved people brought to the United States first set foot in North America.

"There are so many ties that bind Renty and Delia... to that particular part of South Carolina that to repatriate them there is a homecoming ceremony," Lanier said following the settlement.

Dr. Tonya M. Matthews, President and CEO of the IAAM, emphasized the museum's commitment to displaying the images with "truth and empathy". The museum plans to anchor a permanent exhibit around the daguerreotypes, detailing the lives of Renty, Delia, and the five others pictured Jack, Drana, Alfred, Fassena, and Jem.

A sample image of "Papa" Rnety and his daughter Delia, taken in 1850, during a press conference announcing a lawsuit against Harvard University on March 20, 2019 in New York City.

A turning point for institutions

The transfer is being hailed as a "reckoning" for American academic institutions and their historic links to slavery. While Harvard maintained it was "long eager" to place the images in a public institution, Lanier's legal team noted that the university resisted for years until public and legal pressure became insurmountable.❑

From Orbit to Infrastructure: How Satellites now predict bridge collapses

In the realm of modern engineering, the ability to "see" a disaster before it happens has long been the holy grail of public safety. As of March 2026, that vision is becoming a reality through a sophisticated marriage of orbital radar and artificial intelligence.

New research led by the University of Houston and NASA has revealed that satellites can now detect millimeter-scale structural shifts in bridges, providing an early warning system that could prevent catastrophic failures globally.

The technology: Radar that never sleeps

The primary engine behind this breakthrough is Interferometric Synthetic Aperture Radar (InSAR). Unlike traditional cameras that rely on visible light, InSAR satellites emit radar pulses that bounce off the Earth's surface penetrating clouds and working in total darkness.

By comparing these signals over time, scientists can measure "persistent scatterers" stable points on a bridge's deck or pylons to track movement with a precision of just a few millimeters.

This technique, known as Multi-Temporal InSAR (MT-InSAR), allows for continuous oversight without the need for expensive on-site sensors. While traditional physical inspections typically occur only once every two years, satellites like the European Space Agency's Sentinel-1 or the recently launched NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR) can provide updates every 12 days.

Boats used to ferry passengers across the Peusangan river are seen past a collapsed bridge in Kuta Blang, Bireuen district in Indonesia's Aceh province on December 9, 2025, in the aftermath of regional flash floods that killed hundreds.

A global safety net for aging infrastructure

The timing of this technology's maturation is critical. A global analysis of 744 major bridges recently published in Nature Communications highlights a growing crisis:

North America's Vulnerability: Bridges in the U.S. and Canada, many built in the 1960s, are reaching the end of their design lifespans and show the poorest condition globally.

The "Monitoring Gap": Currently, fewer than 1 in 5 long-span bridges (those over 150 meters) have any digital systems to track structural changes.

Predictive Success: Retrospective studies of the Morandi Bridge in Italy and the Tadcaster Bridge in England showed that satellite data had captured unusual displacement patterns months before they collapsed.

By integrating this orbital data into a bridge's "vulnerability score," engineers can reduce the number of structures classified as "high risk" by one-third, as many bridges that appear visually worn may remain structurally stable, while others with hidden flaws can be flagged for immediate intervention.❑

Leading the change: How American Women are forging a sustainable future

March has long been a month dedicated to reflecting on the glass ceilings shattered by the women of our past. However, as Women's History Month 2026 unfolds, a new narrative is taking center stage across the United States. This year's theme, "Leading the Change: Women Shaping a Sustainable Future," shifts the lens from historical milestones to the urgent, innovative work being done by women today to ensure a livable planet for the generations of tomorrow.

From the high-tech corridors of Silicon Valley to the sprawling farmlands of the Midwest, women are no longer just participating in the sustainability movement; they are its primary architects. This week, community leaders, scientists, and entrepreneurs are being honored for their roles in transforming how America produces energy, manages waste, and feeds its citizens.

Sylvia Earle, the first woman to become chief scientist of the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), speaks onstage during TIME Celebrates FIRSTS on September 12, 2017 in New York City.

The power of local leadership

In the heart of Ohio, the "Green Sisters" collective has become a national model for urban renewal. Led by Sarah Jenkins, a former civil engineer, the group has spent the last three years converting abandoned city lots into sophisticated hydroponic farms. Today, these plots provide fresh, organic produce to local schools and food banks, significantly reducing the carbon footprint associated with long-haul food transport.

"Sustainability isn't a luxury; it's a necessity for community health," Jenkins stated during a keynote address at a regional Women's History Month gala this morning. "Women have always been the stewards of their households. Now, we are simply scaling that stewardship to protect our shared home the earth."

The impact of such grassroots efforts is profound. By integrating sustainable practices into the local economy, these leaders are proving that environmentalism and economic growth can go hand-in-hand.

Innovation in the lab and the boardroom

The push for a greener future is equally vibrant in the scientific community. At the University of Washington, a female-led research team recently announced a breakthrough in bio-degradable polymers that could revolutionize the packaging industry. Dr. Elena Rodriguez, the lead researcher, credits the collaborative, multidisciplinary approach of her team composed largely of women for the project's success.

"We look at the lifecycle of a product differently," Rodriguez explains. "It's not just about how it's used today, but where it lives fifty years from now."

In the corporate sector, the shift is just as palpable. According to recent 2026 labor data, women-led startups in the "Clean Tech" sector have seen a 40% increase in venture capital funding over the last two years. These businesses are focusing on everything from residential solar efficiency to AI-driven water conservation tools. By centering sustainability in their business models, these entrepreneurs are redefining what it means to be a "successful" American company in the 21st century.

Mentoring the next generation

A critical component of this year's Women's History Month is the focus on "Eco-Mentorship." Across the country, mentorship programs are pairing seasoned female environmentalists with middle and high school girls interested in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math).❑

Mammograms offer "two-for-one" screening: Predicting heart disease risk

For decades, mammograms have been the gold standard for early breast cancer detection. However, groundbreaking medical research as of March 2026 has confirmed that these routine screenings can also serve as a powerful tool for identifying women at high risk for heart disease. By analyzing breast arterial calcification (BAC) calcium buildup within the arteries of the breast clinicians can now predict future cardiovascular events with startling accuracy.

The Science of BAC: A Red Flag for Heart Health

Heart disease remains the leading cause of death for women globally, yet it is frequently underdiagnosed compared to men. Recent studies, including a major report published in the European Heart Journal on March 9, 2026, show that BAC is a significant marker for cardiovascular risk.

These calcium deposits, which appear as small white dots on a mammogram, indicate that the blood vessels are becoming stiff a process mirrored in the arteries of the heart and brain. Research highlights include:

Increased Risk: Women with BAC are 51% more likely to develop heart disease or have a stroke.

Severity Correlation: Those with severe calcification face a two to three times higher risk of major cardiovascular events like heart attacks and heart failure.

Younger Women: Significantly, these signals are detectable even in women under 50, a group often overlooked in traditional heart disease screenings.

AI: The New Frontier in Preventive Care

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been the catalyst for this medical breakthrough. New AI algorithms can now automatically scan routine mammogram images to quantify arterial calcium and generate a cardiovascular risk score. According to research from The George Institute for Global Health, these AI models predict major cardiac events with accuracy comparable to traditional clinical tools.❑

This photograph shows a view of the SPOT Sante (R), a bus launched in September touring the neighborhoods in the eastern French town of Strasbourg to bring healthcare closer to residents and a "breast bus" (L) to raise awareness of breast cancer and screenings, with a radiologist explaining mammograms, in Strasbourg, eastern France, on 9 October 2024.

New generation of Irish actors harness talent for global stardom

Dublin, Ireland

When the envelopes are opened at the Academy Awards in Los Angeles, one of the few guarantees is that actors from Ireland population just over five million are increasingly likely to be in the frame.

Performers from the Emerald Isle have become regular fixtures on Oscar shortlists in recent years, with wins, nominations and breakout performances.

Cillian Murphy, Barry Keoghan, Paul Mescal and Saoirse Ronan are among those helping cement the country's reputation as a powerhouse of screen acting.

Now Jessie Buckley, who has swept all major awards this season for her role as William Shakespeare's wife in Chloe Zhao's "Hamnet", is poised to add a Best Actress Oscar to her collection.

Thousands of miles from Los Angeles the next wave of Irish acting talent is being shaped on rehearsal floors at institutions like The Lir Academy in Dublin's docklands.

Founded in 2011 and linked to Trinity College Dublin, The Lir Academy whose alumni include Mescal admits only small cohorts of just 16 students each year for intensive conservatoire-style training.

This photo taken on February 27, 2026 shows drama students rehearsing at the Lir Academy in Dublin.

In the rehearsal room, however, there is little talk of Hollywood.

The focus is on voice, movement, accents and classical text, which produces performers with technical control and crucially "authenticity", Director of Actor Training Gavin O'Donoghue told AFP.

"One of the most important elements of learning here is the ability to be a spontaneous actor on stage and on screen," O'Donoghue told AFP on a grey Dublin morning between classes.

"Screen acting demands being rooted in emotional and psychological truth, and Irish actors do that really well."

- Theatre-first tradition –

The foundational skills taught at The Lir Academy are reinforced by Ireland's wider theatre-first tradition in which actors often do stage before screen.

Ireland's tradition of playwrights from J.M. Synge who helped set up Dublin's Abbey Theatre in 1899 to Martin McDonagh whose film "Banshees of Inisherin" was nominated for a raft of Oscars in 2023 underpins the acting culture from which many screen stars emerge.

At the Abbey, Ireland's national showcase, actors perform in intimate auditoriums where language and psychological detail are paramount, according to its artistic director Caitriona McLaughlin.

"There is something about having to perform live in the moment that makes screen actors who come through Irish theatres exciting to watch," she said.

"Irish actors have it all," McLaughlin told AFP as she kept an eye on last rehearsals for an upcoming centenary revival of Sean O'Casey's 1926 Irish classic "The Plough and the Stars".

"They have a strong connection with words so can play into the psychology of a character, they are physical, energetic, and have a great capacity for humour as well as drama," she said.

Irish actors' "vocal quality" that allows them to excel at accents like British and American and "lose themselves in the character" also makes them unique, according to McLaughlin.

Actors like Andrew Scott who honed his craft at the Abbey Saoirse Ronan, and Cillian Murphy of "Peaky Blinders" fame, can easily play British or American roles due to their aptitude for accents, she said.

- Talent spotted early -

Opportunities for young actors to build careers at home before Hollywood comes calling are also a factor in the current success, said state film-funder Screen Ireland's marketing head Louise Ryan.❑

'Legendary' Barbra Streisand to receive Honorary Palme d'Or at Cannes

Paris, France

Hollywood and Broadway legend Barbra Streisand will be awarded an Honorary Palme d'Or at this year's Cannes Film Festival, organisers announced Wednesday, honouring a career that has spanned more than six decades.

Barbra Streisand accepts the SAG Lifetime Achievement Award onstage during the 30th Annual Screen Actors Guild Awards at Shrine Auditorium and Expo Hall on February 24, 2024 in Los Angeles, California.

"It is with pride and deep humility that I am delighted to join the circle of Honorary Palme d'Or winners, whose work has inspired me for so long," said the Broadway icon. She will receive the award at the festival's closing ceremony in May.

Streisand will add the prize to a legendary collection that includes four Emmys, ten Grammys, two Oscars, and a Tony. She is one of only 22 people to have achieved the elite EGOT status, winning the top U.S. prizes in television, music, cinema and theatre.

After her start as breakout star in theatre on Broadway, Streisand evolved into a global icon across both the film and music industries.

She famously won the Best Actress Oscar for her first film role in 1968's "Funny Girl" at just 26-years-old before taking home a second in 1977 for "Evergreen", the original song from "A Star Is Born", in which she also played the lead role.

Streisand later stepped behind the camera to write, direct, and produce the film "Yentl" the story of a young woman who disguises herself as a man to study the Talmud.

The project, based on a short story by Isaac Bashevis Singer, took 14 years to bring to the screen, but got seven Oscar nominations in 1984.

"It was the first time Hollywood had given such a large production budget to a female filmmaker," noted the Cannes festival.

Streisand is also the only female artist to have had an album top the charts in each of the last six decades.

For Cannes director Thierry Fremaux, the prize recognises Streisand's contribution as the "legendary synthesis between Broadway and Hollywood, between the music hall stage and the big screen".❑

Shabby beauty: Inside Japan's oldest, defiant student dorm

Kyoto,Japan
Graffiti defaces tattered clay walls and trash piles up in Japan's oldest student dormitory, but Masako Ueda is savouring every last moment in the mice-infested building slated for temporary closure.
The elite Kyoto University's "Yoshida Dorm" is self-governed by students, who treasure it as a bastion of free thinking away from the strict hierarchies that permeate many Japanese institutions.
But the dorm has had to fight to keep its autonomy, and has been enmeshed in a decades-long battle with the university, which owns it and has at times threatened its closure, saying it's unsafe.
Under the terms of a court-mediated settlement reached last year, students will by the end of March vacate the dorm's 113-year-old wooden residential building to allow for repairs but many fear it may be unrecognisable once they return.
"I feel at ease with this shabby place. It's steeped in humanity a squeaky-clean place feels lifeless to me," 39-year-old Ueda told AFP, clutching her favourite turtle plushie .

The approximately 100 students living in the dormitory enjoy mahjong, video games and shisha together

This picture taken on February 4, 2026 shows a general view of the exterior of Kyoto University's Yoshida Dormitory in Kyoto.

in their decrepit surrounds, where windows are broken, the toilets are rusty and spider webs gather.
Self-initiative is key and students hold sometimes convoluted town hall meetings to agree unanimously on their policies and daily operations. They also choose new dorm members themselves.
Everyone speaks freely regardless of nationality or gender.

Even seniority-based formalities, an ingrained feature of Japan's social and business etiquette, were jettisoned long ago to place freshmen on an equal footing with the oldest housemates.
In a conventional dorm with rules laid out by the university, "our lives would've been easier, because we wouldn't have to think for ourselves," said 23-year-old student Rintaro Yoshida.
But "instead of mindlessly accepting what already exists, here you can modify living spaces or design new systems as you see fit, as long as you can get everyone else on board," he said.

- Arrests, injuries -
Two residential buildings and a heavily graffitied dining hall constitute Yoshida Dorm.
While most residents sleep in its newer, cleaner property, students still regularly use the squalid "gento" or old building which they describe as their "spiritual backbone".
The monthly rent of 2,500 yen ($16) has made it a safety net for poor students.
The spirit of self-governance is best embodied by the retro old building, whose walls bear handwritten slogans like "No to Dorm Closures!" and philosophical maxims including by Italian radical leftist Antonio Negri.

But the fight to preserve the dormitory's independence has put the students who have themselves demanded repairs over the years at loggerheads with Kyoto University, which counts 10 Nobel prize winners among its alumni.

Fierce anti-closure protests in the 1980s saw students arrested and others injured, and tensions flared again in 2017 when the institution ordered all residents to vacate and banned new admissions on account of earthquake vulnerabilities.

Authorities even sued a group of students in 2019 to demand they leave, before the drawn-out saga concluded in August with officials committing to "seismic renovations, including reconstruction," and students agreeing to temporarily move.
Chinese student Han Yi Fan, 27, was not among those named in the lawsuit, but watching his peers as they battled for autonomy, "I felt how helpless we were", he told AFP.
"It drove home to me just how stressful and exhausting top-down decision-making can be for those who aren't the ones in power," he said.

As a result, he is now more involved in social activism, joining protests on issues surrounding Palestine and homelessness. ❑

Punch the baby monkey isn't being bullied: Japan zoo

Tokyo, Japan
A Japanese zoo caring for a baby monkey who has become an internet sensation was forced to issue a statement denying he was being bullied, following an outpouring of concern online.

Punch, a seven-month-old baby macaque, was abandoned by his mother and shot to stardom after he began clinging to a plush orangutan toy from IKEA for comfort at Ichikawa City Zoo outside Tokyo.
But after the zoo posted on X last month that Punch "had been scolded many times by other monkeys", videos showing him being chased by members of the troop were spread online, alongside claims that he was being bullied.
"As a result, we have received many voices of concern from people both in Japan and overseas," the zoo said in a statement Tuesday.
The zoo added that Punch was becoming less reliant on the stuffed orangutan toy because increasing numbers of monkeys were looking after or playing with him.
"While dominant individuals may show disciplining actions toward their subordinates, as macaques do naturally, these actions in the macaque society 'differ from human abuses'," it said.
"Punch spends most of the day peacefully," the zoo added.

The zoo also warned that "Punch has become accustomed to living in this troop, so separating him now would create the risk that he would never be able to return to the group and would have to continue living that way for the rest of his life".

Spurned by its mother, Punch was raised in an artificial environment after being born in July, and began training to rejoin his troop earlier this year.
Punch's predicament sparked huge interest online, spawning a devoted fanbase under the hashtag #HangInTherePunch, as large crowds thronged the zoo, and sales of his IKEA orangutan toy boomed.❑

This photo taken on February 19, 2026 shows a 7 month-old male macaque monkey named Punch, who was abandoned by his mother shortly after birth, spending time with a stuffed orangutan toy at Ichikawa City Zoo and Botanical Gardens in Chiba Prefecture.

Bangladesh sari weaving tradition hangs by a thread

Tangail, Bangladesh
Bangladesh's Tangail sari is fighting for survival as weavers warn that automation and economic pressures are pushing the centuries-old craft to the brink despite its global acclaim.

The detailed designs and fine textures of the garments made in the central Tangail city won UNESCO recognition in December as intangible cultural heritage reflecting "local social and cultural practices".
But it has brought little relief to crowded local workshops where a shift to automated looms, evolving fashion choices, unstable yarn prices and a lack of government support have squeezed weavers at every turn.
Ajit Kumar Roy, who spends the day interlacing warp and weft threads while paddling the shuttle back and forth, says the honour has done little to ease his daily hardship.
"It's all hard work," the 35-year-old weaver told AFP as he worked the handloom he has operated for nearly two decades.
"Hands, legs and eyes must move together. If I make a mistake then there is a problem."

A Bangladeshi shopkeeper shows a traditional Tangail sari to a customer at a store in Tangail on March 2, 2026.

Men typically lead the weaving, dyeing and design work, while women prepare threads, apply rice starch and add finishing touches.

- High-profile clients -
Once considered a well-paying profession, weaving has suffered from a market slump that began during the Covid-19 pandemic and never recovered.
Roy said his factory owner used to run 20 handlooms but now has only 10.
"Some factories have shut down entirely," Roy said.
With demand falling and costs rising, many weavers have abandoned the craft, turning to driving or construction work to survive.
"We earn 700 taka ($6) per sari, and it takes at least two days to make one. How can a family of four live on 350 taka a day?"
Raghunath Basak, president of a local sari traders' association, whose family has preserved Tangail weaving for generations, fears the craft may end with him.

His ancestors migrated in search of weather and water suitable for weaving before settling in Tangail, nestled in a low-lying floodplain near the Jamuna River.
"I brought my son into the profession too, but I don't know how he will cope after I am gone," Basak, 75, said from his showroom, where shiny crests line the walls.
Despite high-profile clients from political leaders in India's West Bengal state to ousted Bangladeshi prime minister Sheikh Hasina, who wore his sari to deliver a speech to the UN General Assembly Basak says the industry is struggling.

- Cultural symbol -
A halt to land-port trade with neighbouring India following a diplomatic fallout has also affected business.
"We used to export saris by road and import yarn when local prices shot up. Now land ports on both sides are sealed. Export has become almost impossible," he said.
In the 1960s, the sari emerged as a cultural symbol as Bengalis in what was then East Pakistan embraced their ethnic identity.
But consumer preference is slowly shifting.
Kaniz Neera, 45, buys two dozen Tangail saris a year, favouring their distinctive patterns and comfortable design, but worries that the younger generation is drifting away.

"Sari is integral to our identity," she said. "My mother wears sari at home and outside. I wear it mostly outside. (But) girls now wear sari only on special occasions."
But researchers remain cautiously optimistic.❑

'Home' at last: Ghana grants citizenship to 150 members of African diaspora

Accra, Ghana
Tightly holding her citizenship certificate against her chest, Patrice Ann Robertson wiped away a tear; she's now officially Ghanaian nearly a decade after she started living in the west African country.

Members of the "historical diaspora" celebrate during the swearing-in ceremony where they took the oath of allegiance to become Ghanaian citizens in Accra, Ghana, on March 9, 2026.

"This is home," the now Ghanaian-American, who lives in Ghana's south-eastern Volta region, told AFP at a ceremony in the oceanside capital Accra.
In nine years since she relocated to Ghana, she has only returned to her birthplace in the United States once.
Robertson was among 150 members of the African diaspora granted Ghanaian citizenship on Monday, the latest group in a growing initiative to reconnect descendants of Africans abroad with the continent of their ancestors.
More than 1,000 Africans in the diaspora have obtained Ghanaian citizenship in recent years, many of them Black Americans drawn by a mix of historical, cultural and personal motivations.
For some, the ceremony at which they waved miniature Ghana flags in jubilation, marked the culmination of years of identity search.
Nataki Kambon, who obtained Ghanaian citizenship in 2019 and attended Monday's ceremony, said becoming a Ghanaian allowed her to reconnect with a part of her identity rooted in ancestry but long distant from her daily life.
"I grew up in a household where we always knew we were African," she said. "But there's still a disconnect because of how Africa is portrayed in the United States."

- 'Global African family' -
Ghana's Vice President Jane Naana Opoku-Agyemang and Interior Minister Muntaka Mubarak Mohammed attended the ceremony. The new citizens took an oath of allegiance before receiving their certificates.q
"Distance may separate our people, but it does not erase identity," Opoku-Agyemang said. "Ghana continues to be a home for the global African family."❑

Unique fauna of Aruba

For a small island, Aruba sure has a lot of unique treasures. Among these, we have some subspecies of animals that are unique to our island. These have evolved to perfectly adapt to our desert climate and make Aruba their home. At the same time, they are part of what makes Aruba truly one of a kind.

Cascabel (rattlesnake, Crotalus durissus unicolor)
According to the Arikok National Park, Aruba knows two kinds of snakes, the Santanero and the Cascabel. The cascabel belongs to the rattlesnake family. The cascabel is the only venomous snake from Aruba. It has a length of 65cm to 100cm, and is about 4 to 5cm wide. Its color varies from light brown to grey-brown, and its underbelly is white. On its back there are marks that are a little darker, in the shape of diamonds.

Its reproduction is oviparous, meaning the offspring can hatch from their eggs just before, during or immediately after laying.

The cascabel lives mainly in the Arikok National Park. It likes to live in dark places, and is thus found hidden among the limestone rocks and under stones. As a defense mechanism, the cascabel uses its rattle as a warning, and it is not an aggressive animal.

The cascabel feeds on lizards, small mammals such as rats and mice. It paralyzes or kills its prey with its venom, which is injected through a bite. The enemies of the cascabel are donkeys, goats, humans and cars. Humans are the biggest enemy of the cascabel, as they kill them and destroy their habitat for urbanization.

Shoco (burrowing owl, Athene cunicularia arubensis)
The shoco is a small bird which is seldom seen. They are active during the day but are more active later in the day and at night for hunting. These owls have very good night vision and very good hearing. The shoco is the national symbol of Aruba.

The shoco has about 20cm of length, and the females are slightly heavier than the males. They are light brown in color, with many white spots. The belly of the shoco is either white or light brown, and the shoco has striking yellow eyes. Its beak is yellow/green. Young owls do not have white spots and are lighter in color.

The nest of the shoco is a burrow in the ground. If the shoco cannot find a burrow, it will dig one in soft soil. The shoco lays one or two eggs every other day until all the eggs are laid – a shoco can lay up to four eggs. The first owlets hatch after three to four weeks. The shoco owl takes care of the owlets for three months until they leave the nest. Only a few owlets survive.

The owls dig burrows in the ground with low grass vegetation. An owl can live up to nine years.

Its defense mechanism is simply to fly away or retreat to its burrows. They eat mostly insects, mice and lizards, and the main threats to their survival are boas – an invasive species introduced by humans as pets – and humans through destruction of their habitat.

Prikichi (parakeet, Aratinga pertinax)
The Prikichi is the national bird of Aruba. On Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao, parakeets can be found, but each of the three islands has a different breed. The Yellow-shouldered Amazon parakeet that we have on Aruba is also found along the coast of Venezuela. Unfortunately, there is interbreeding between the breeds due to cage birds from, for example, Curaçao being released on Aruba. The parakeet population on Aruba is in danger due to extensive deforestation occurring on the island because of the growing population.

The prikichi weighs between 90 to 100 grams. It has a greenish-brown head with some yellow around the eye. The back and wings of the parakeet are dark green, and the underside of the body is a lighter shade of green. There is also a bit of blue in the wings. The parakeet's beak is gray/black.

Parakeets often use termite nests as breeding sites. Parakeets are found in all natural environments (mondi) of the island. It defends itself by flying away and loud cries. Parakeets eat seeds from the pods of the Kwihi tree, Divi Divi, and columnar cactus. They also consume natural fruits. Its main predators are boa constrictors, humans.

Coneu (cottontail rabbit, Sylvilagus floridanus nigronuchalis)
The Eastern Cottontail rabbit (Sylvilagus floridanus) was probably brought over to the island by Indian settlers thousands of years ago as a source of food. This rabbit, locally known as Coneu, has spread all over the island and has become part of our ecosystem. The very adaptable Coneu can live in a wide variety of habitats, including Aruba's xeric scrublands, where it typically grazes on weeds and grasses.

The Aruban Coneu has a brownish grey color and a distinctive white belly. This white fur extends to the bottom of the tail which becomes visible as the rabbit runs. These rabbits can grow up to approximately 40 centimeters in length over their short lifespan of 3 years. Cottontail rabbits reach reproductive maturity when they are just 2 to 3 months old. A female rabbit, called a doe, finds a suitable nest spot under a shrub or rocks and lines it with fur. She can have an average of 3 to 4 liters per year averaging 5 young each. The doe only visits her young once or twice a day to nurse her babies for a period of 2 to 3 weeks. The young reach independence at 4 to 5 weeks.

The Aruban Coneu is an endangered species and protected by Aruban law. The Coneu is thought to have drastically declined due to an increase in human activities, habitat fragmentation and predation by the invasive Boa constrictor as well as feral cats and dogs. However, recently there seem to be more rabbit sightings in rural and wilderness areas and also in the National Park. This could be linked to a recent decline of the invasive Boa population after the long period of drought. As the Coneu can reproduce very quickly, a short break in predation pressure can lead to a fast increase of rabbits.

These are but a few of Aruba's beautiful inhabitant, which we must all contribute to protect. ❑

Experience a taste of Belgium in Aruba – Only at L'Avenue, Palm Beach

Nestled in the heart of Palm Beach, Aruba, L'Avenue brings a fresh breeze of Belgian charm to the Caribbean. Just over a year since its grand opening, this intimate bistro has quickly made its mark with its warm hospitality, authentic cuisine, and elegant yet approachable ambiance.

Whether you're strolling through Palm Beach after a morning at the beach or looking for a special dinner spot, L'Avenue welcomes you with an inviting terrace, stylish décor, and the comforting aroma of Belgian classics crafted to perfection. It's a place where locals, travelers, food lovers, and beer connoisseurs come together — united by a love for great food, heartfelt service, and that unmistakable European flair.

At L'Avenue, every dish tells a story — one of tradition, seasonality, and bold yet balanced flavors. From crispy croquettes and perfectly poured Belgian beers

to steaming pots of fresh mussels flown in weekly, the menu offers something both comforting and surprising.

Lunch includes a variety of sandwiches—with a healthy selection of bread options—if you're going for a light meal, but just like their dinner selection, also includes steak, chicken, fish, and even rabbit if you're craving a bit more of L'Avenue's exquisite menu. And let's not forget their wide selection of Belgian beer and European wine to complete the tasty experience!

But that's not all! L'Avenue is offering their guests their Early Bird Special, available every day from 4pm to 7pm. Enjoy this affordable and delectable 3-course meal special at a comfortable price of $29.50 per guest, which includes a selection of their fine in-house wine.

More Than a Bistro — A Culinary Destination

L'Avenue is more than just a place to eat — it's a culinary destination. A thoughtfully curated menu, an extensive selection of premium Belgian beers, and an atmosphere that balances European elegance with island ease make it one of the most talked-about dining spots in Aruba.

Whether you're looking for a casual lunch, a romantic dinner, or a celebratory evening with friends, L'Avenue delivers a dining experience that's as memorable as it is delicious.

Open daily for lunch and dinner

Located in the heart of Palm Beach, Aruba Come discover Belgium's best — right here at L'Avenue.❑

Why You Should Not Miss Aruba's Free City Center Street Car Tour

(Oranjestad)—Aruba's City Center Street Car – or as we call it in Dutch; "Tram van Oranjestad' – is a single track tram line in Oranjestad, the capital city of Aruba. It was inaugurated on 22 December 2012, being the first and so far the only passenger rail service on Aruba and the rest of the Dutch Caribbean. There are two trolleys, a single-deck one with 42 seats and a double-decker with 64 seats. The line was inspired by the popular battery-powered streetcar operation at the Grove in Los Angeles, USA. Aruba's streetcars are powered by hydrogen fuel cells, which are charged by the island's year-round trade winds.

Caya Betico Croes, mostly referred to as our "main street" has been developed into a pollution-free pedestrian mall. The double-decker offers you a 360 degree view of the down town area with a picture perfect scenery of the island's clear blue skies. Who would not enjoy a ride on this beautiful and naturally air-conditioned vehicle? The tour consists of a total of 9 stops approximately 200 meters apart from each other; all stops are clearly marked. The tram will bring you close to different museums, historical plazas, monuments, the Protestant church, Aruba's high- end mall, retail shops, and a variety of local and international cuisine restaurants. The "I love Aruba" trademark also belongs to that list. The third stop on the route is close to a 5-minute walk to the famous Renaissance Marina showcasing luxurious yachts and Aruba's blue waters.

The "Tram van Oranjestad" starts from a balloon loop near the Port of Call and serves the downtown area and ends at Plaza Nicky. The first ride starts at 10:00 am sharp with intervals of 25 minutes. The last trolley departs from the cruise port at 5:00 pm. Don't miss this tour of the beautiful Aruba's City Center – it is free for all!❑

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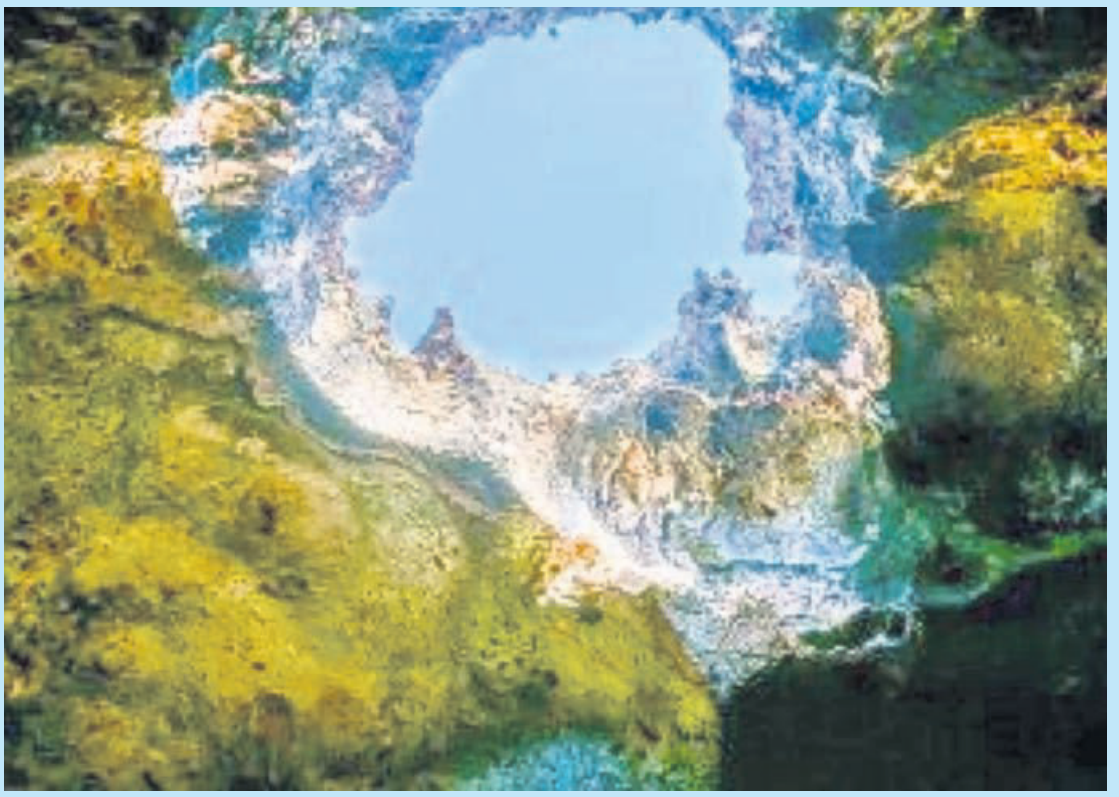
Explore Aruba!



(ORANJESTAD)—Aruba Today collected some things to do BEYOND the beach. Aruba, located 15 miles north of Venezuela in the warm waters of the southern Caribbean, is home to beautiful white-sand beaches, 82-degree days, and thus ideal for the perfect beach day. But we are also blessed with some of the warmest people in the world and our island is 19.6 miles long and 6 miles across, with a total area of 70 square miles. Bit more to discover than the white stretch on the coastline we say. Let's mention some of these hidden gems.

Arikok National Park

The Arikok National park is worth the ride. We love the hikes that are guided by the park's rangers whose job is to maintain trails and protect natural resources. The flora and fauna are beautiful and the historical sites tell you about the island's indigenous roots. If you are not up to walking, you can drive through the park, one way or another this park is a great place to spend an entire day. Cruising through the landscape you end up at some of the most stunning beaches like Dos Playa or Daimara Beach. In total, the park consists of 34 square kilometers of protected nature with a richness of animals living in it. The Aruban whiptail lizard (cododo), Aruban cat eye snake (santanero) and endangered rattle snake (cascabel) are just some of them, you can also admire these close in the park's Visitors' Center. For more information, visit the website www.acf.aw

Natural Bridge

One of Aruba's favorite tourist attractions is the Natural Bridge. For thousands of years, pounding waves and strong winds have slowly chiseled away the limestone cliffs along Aruba's north coast to create several natural bridges. The largest of these bridges used to be the famous Natural Bridge. The bridge was a formation of coral limestone cut out by years of pounding surf, and was one of the largest of these types of spans in the world. It stood some 23 feet (7 meters) above sea level and spans more than 100 feet (30 meters). Unfortunately the bridge collapsed on September 2, 2005. Despite this, it is still the most photographed natural bridge and it remains a popular tourist attraction in Aruba, with the adjacent and intact Baby Bridge also meriting a visit. The Natural Bridge is the perfect stop while touring Aruba. There is no admission fee or set hours for visiting. Quench your thirst with refreshing beverages & refuel your tank with local snacks.

The Lourdes Grotto

Named in commemoration of the famous French religious landmark, was created under the guidance of a priest named "Erkamp" and parishioners in the year 1958. The grotto, a shrine built into the rocks is located in Seroe Preto, just off the main road to San Nicolas. A statue of the Virgin Mary, weighing 700 kilos, was hoisted into place in the grotto. Every year, on February 11 (feast of Lady of Lourdes), a procession leaves from the St. Theresita church in San Nicolas to the grotto, where a mass is performed. The grotto is located road-side and can be visited daily. Just make sure you park safely in the event you wish to stop for pictures at this location.❑

Dining in? Try making some local favorites!

How to make "funchi"

(Oranjestad)—One of the most famous Aruban snacks or appetizers is "funchi hasa" (fried polenta sticks), a super easy meal that adults and children will both enjoy. Here's how to make it!

Before we start, get to know the basics

What is funchi hasa? Funchi, or Aruban polenta, is a popular side dish for local dishes, like soups, stews and fried fish. Made from a corn flour, water and butter mixture, this appetizer is traditionally eaten alongside a warm meal. However, locals also like to fry sticks of funchi for a quick and filling snack.

Ingredients (measured by heart)

1. Polenta flour/Funchi flour
2. Water
3. Butter
4. Salt to taste

Directions

Bring water to a boil in a medium-sized sauce pan. Add in some salt and butter to taste in the boiling water and let this dissolve and melt. Then, gradually add the flour while stirring with a wooden spoon. The mixture will start to begin to harden pretty fast, so be careful not to add too much. At this phase of cooking, you want a goopy thick mixture, but thin enough so you can continue to stir to get all the lumps out.

After reaching a semi-firm, yet flexible texture, grab a baking pan or any large, deep plate, and pour the mixture in. Be sure that this plate is wet or greased so that the mixture does not stick to the bottom. Let this cool completely while it firms up for the last time. Once it's cooled you can enjoy it as is, topped with some butter or shredded cheese. Or, you can take it to another level of deliciousness.

When your funchi is firm enough, cut it into strips (size is up to you). Heat up some oil in a pan and fry those babies up! After frying, you can top it with some cheese or enjoy it with your favorite dipping sauce.❑

Photo credit of fried funchi sticks: Jacqueline Felida on Pinterest.

Planning on snorkeling? Get to know our Candelchi!

ORANJESTAD—If you're ever planning on snorkeling during your vacation on Aruba, you may spot fish that you can't recognize. One of these may be the "Candelchi" (Squirrelfish), a common, yet shy fish that swims all year long in the waters of Aruba.

Let's talk about the names of fish. Do you know your fish? The Department of Agriculture, Livestock, and Fisheries, known as Santa Rosa, offers this informative article that illustrates some fish and their names in Papiamento.

Candelchi, Squirrelfish, Holocentrus adscensionis:

Candelchi actually refers to the entire squirrelfish family or, as some say, when we say candelchi, we mean several different species but without distinguishing them by species. In this picture, we are showing the most common one in our waters, which is called squirrelfish in English or scientifically known as Holocentrus adscensionis.

Under candelchi, we in Aruba generally refer to all the different species of squirrelfish. They all look alike and it's really difficult to distinguish between them.

The squirrelfish family is distinguished by the following characteristics. They are heart-shaped with pink or red hues and often show heart-shaped streaks between the scales along the body. They have hard fins and are always armed. Over at our sister island Curaçao, they are called "bari di clabo" (nail barrel) for that reason.

In our waters, there are 7 to 8 types or species present and they are sometimes caught and seen occasionally. They can be distinguished by different marks such as color on the dorsal spine or marks on the body.

In Aruba:

Candelchi are found on reefs or areas with structure in the water where they can hide. Although they prefer to hunt for food at night, they are also active during the day. They are edible and delicious when prepared dry and crispy with lime. It is particularly challenging to scale the fish, which is why it is not one of the favorites among fishermen. They often live in groups.❑

Aruba to me

ORANJESTAD — You are back or still enjoying your vacation?… we would like to portrait you! By inviting you to send us your favorite vacation picture while enjoying our Happy Island.

Complete the sentence: Aruba to me is ……. Send your picture with that text (including your name and where you are from) to: news@arubatoday.com and we will publish your vacation memory. Isn't that a special way to keep your best moments alive? Please do note: By submitting photos, text or any other materials, you give permission to The Aruba Today Newspaper, Caribbean Speed Printers and any of its affiliated companies to use said materials, as well as names, likeness, etc. for promotional purposes without compensation.

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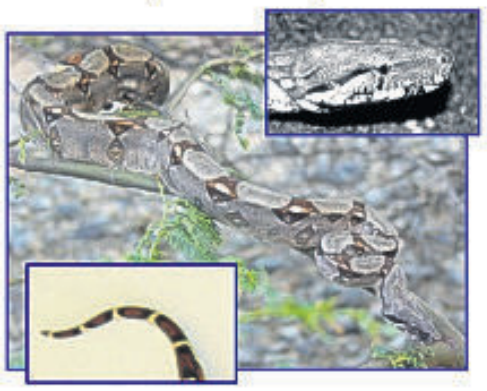
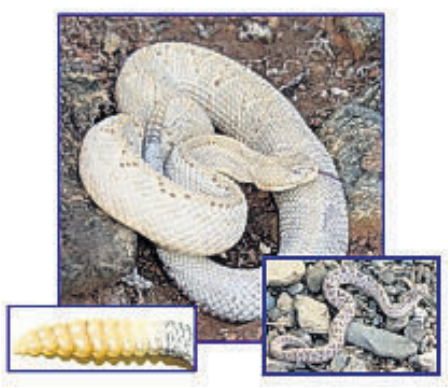
Snakes of Aruba

BOA
(Boa constrictor)



CASCABEL
(Crotalus unicolor)



SANTANERO
(Leptodeira bakeri)

Arikok National Park is home to various unique plant and animal species such as Aruba's rare endemic rattlesnake Crotalus unicolor). This rattlesnake is locally known as the 'Cascabel'. But Aruba has two more snake species living on the island: the Santanero and the Boa.

Cascabel (Crotalus unicolor)

The small Cascabel or Aruba Island Rattlesnake averages 70 cm in length. The body color is often uniform gray or light brown. There may be a faint pattern of diamond shaped markings on the back. This pattern is most noticeable on younger snakes. The most distinctive feature of this snake is the rattle at the end of its tail which makes a buzzing sound when the snake is alarmed. Cascabels are shy and not aggressive, but their venom can be dangerous to humans. It is best to leave this snake alone. Do not attempt to catch or kill it.

Cascabels hunt by waiting under bushes and fruiting trees to catch passing lizards, mice, rats, small rabbits, and an occasional bird. This is often considered to be one of the rarest rattlesnakes in the world. The range of the Cascabel is restricted to the rugged and mountainous areas of the island mostly within Arikok National Park. The Arikok National Park was designated in the early 1980s to include most of the rattlesnake's population, providing a safe refuge in which the snake can be protected and monitored. The government has also implemented outreach and education initiatives to change local perception of the snake and highlight its ecological and economic importance – it is now being promoted as a national symbol.

Arikok's partnership with the Toledo zoo has safeguarded the rattlesnake ex-situ and led to a number of research projects collecting critical data on the Cascabel's abundance, life history and habitat requirement to help guide future conservation efforts.

Santanero

The slender Santanero or Aruban Cat-eyed Snake is typically less than 50 cm long. This snake is recognizable by the large scales on the top of its head and by its pattern of dark brown bands alternating with light brown bands. The belly is plain white or cream colored without any markings. This snake is shy and not aggressive. However, it has enlarged teeth at the back of its mouth and mild venom which is not dangerous to humans. However, the venom can paralyze small lizards and frogs. Santaneros are most active at night when they search for food. During the day, they hide under rocks or leaves. They frequently climb trees and cactus. Santaneros eat toads, frogs, insects, and lizards. You may find Santaneros near dams during periods of rainy weather or crossing roads at night. This snake is found island wide. A Santanero in your garden will keep away the unwanted insects. If you encounter a Santanero around your garden, please do not harm this species.

Boa (Boa constrictor)

Boas are Aruba's largest snakes. The longest Boa found on the island was slightly less than 3 m. Newborn Boas average 35 cm. Boas are not venomous. The most distinctive feature of a Boa is its pattern of dark brown and tan blotches which become red toward the tail. The belly in white or cream colored with numerous black spots. Boas are excellent climbers and may be found in trees and cactus. Boas also hide in the leaves under bushes waiting to catch prey that pass. Boas catch their prey with their teeth and then constrict it in their coils. The Boa's diet consists of birds, lizards, rats, mice, and rabbits. Large Boas have been known to eat small goats and chickens. When threatened, Boas will hiss loudly. Boas are a non-native species. The first Boas were reported on the island in 1999. Since that time they have been found across the entire island in all types of habitats.❑

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ARUBA TODAY

CROSSWORD

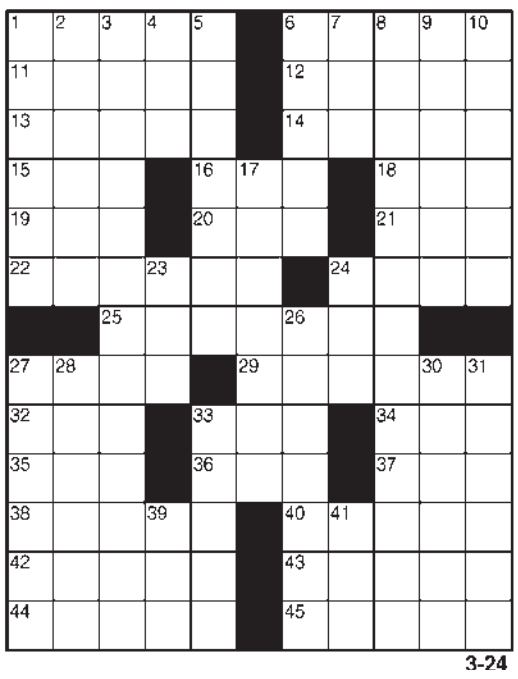
By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Kitchen gadget
6 Harold of "Ghostbusters"
11 Be penitent
12 Before, in Brest
13 Crucifixes
14 Best Picture of 1955
15 Squid's squirt
16 Truck part
18 Gadot of "Wonder Woman"
19 Biol. or geol.
20 First número
21 Tea cooler
22 Didn't ignore
24 Crumb carriers
25 Casablanca setting
27 Domingo song
29 Short jacket
32 Second número
33 Ornate vase
34 Yale student
35 Place to park
36 Plunked down
37 Guitarist Wood
38 Pol's concern
40 "Luther" star Elba
42 Hog rider
43 Caribou's cousin
44 Appears
45 Fairy tale monsters

DOWN

1 Parson's domain
2 Right away
3 Beginner's blunder
4 Purpose
5 Firefighter, at times
6 Stallone role
7 Director DuVernay
8 Poll calculation
9 Unbroken
10 Fashions
17 Neighbor of Spain
23 Film noir classic
24 Trick taker, often
26 Peseta division
27 Ignores the script
28 Dorm sharer
30 Precocious Plaza resident
31 Frees of suds
33 Manual readers
39 Opal or onyx
41 Pound occupant



3-24

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

3-24 CRYPTOQUOTE

SGY SKYYV XCHH SYHH SGYCK

VYQKYSV SP SGPVY SGNS

SWTY CT. — VSYDYT LNBYY

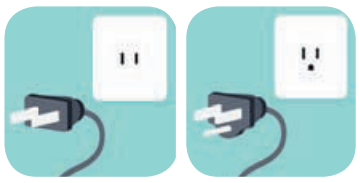
Cryptoquote: DON'T WAIT FOR SOMEONE TO BRING YOU FLOWERS. PLANT YOUR OWN GARDEN AND DECORATE YOUR OWN SOUL. — LUTHER BURBANK

Cruise ship Schedule: March 09 - 15 2026

			ARR	DEPT	BERTH	
MON	09	BRITANNIA	07.00	18.00	B	1
		MARELLA DISCOVERY 2	08.00	20.00	C	1
		CARIBBEAN PRINCESS	08.00	22.00	I	1
TUE	10	SERENADE OF THE SEAS	08.00	23.00	B	1
		NORWEGIAN SKY	13.30	22.30	C	1
		OASIS OF THE SEAS	08.00	23.00	I	1
WED	11	CELEBRITY SILHOUETTE	07.00	17.00	B	1
		CARNIVAL MAGIC	09.00	22.00	C	1
THU	12	BRILLANCE OF THE SEAS	08.00	23.00	B	1
		OCEANIA ALLURA	11.00	23.00	C	1
SUN	15	STAR PRIDE	06.00	18.00	C	1

Helpful tips for your stay on Aruba

(Oranjestad)—When traveling to another country, especially for the first time, it is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared. That is why we have a list of basicbut important information that we think may come in handy to Aruba's visitors.



Electrical power

Aruba generally operates on 110V to 127V supply voltage and 60Hz. There are also three types of outlets used on the island: type A with two flat prongs; type B with two flat and one grounding prong, and on occasion, type F with two round prong and two earth clips on the side. However, Type A is most commonly found in homes and establishments.

Drinking water

The water that flows through the sinks of every house, hotels and other establishments is distilled and perfectly safe to drink. Aruba's drinking water exceeds WHO's international standards for water quality, so there is no need to buy bottled water from the store.

Safety

Since February 2024, Aruba has been categorized as the safest country in the Caribbean by The Telegraph, and many tourist that visit have often told us how they feel safe to explore the island or walk around at night. However, rare incidents do occurs, so keep yourself and your belongings safe.

SUDOKU

To play sudoku, use logic to fill the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the numbers 1-9 only once. Puzzle difficulty increases from Monday to Sunday.

King Classic Sudoku

8	6	7					1	5
				7	6		9	
4			2		1	7		
	7			9	3			
	5	8		6	7		2	
	4	1						
	1			2			6	
							3	2
2	3	9	6	1			5	7

Difficulty: ★★★ 3/12

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Answer to previous puzzle

3	7	6	1	2	8	5	9	4
1	5	2	4	7	9	6	8	3
4	8	9	5	3	6	7	1	2
7	9	3	8	4	1	2	6	5
2	6	8	3	9	5	1	4	7
5	1	4	2	6	7	8	3	9
9	2	7	6	8	4	3	5	1
8	3	5	9	1	2	4	7	6
6	4	1	7	5	3	9	2	8

Difficulty: ★★★ 3/11

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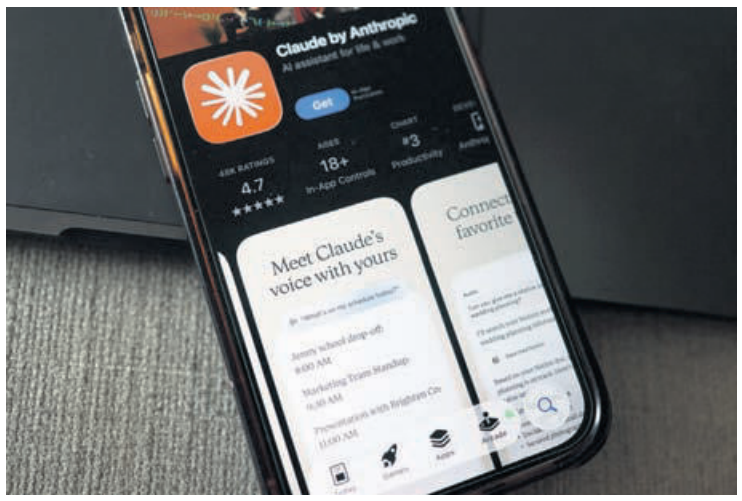
Microsoft urges Pentagon pause blacklisting Anthropic

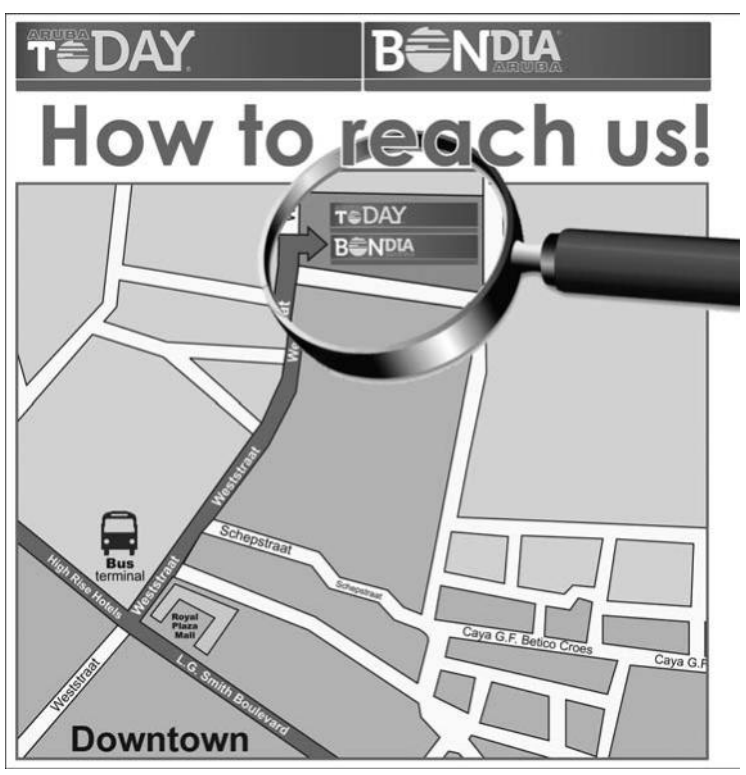
San Francisco, United States
Microsoft on Tuesday warned a judge that the Pentagon blacklisting of Anthropic could hamper U.S. warfighters and imperil the country's drive to lead in artificial intelligence.
In a brief, Microsoft backed Anthropic's request for an order stopping the Pentagon from implementing its ban on the use of Anthropic AI until the matter is settled in court.
Anthropic filed suit this week against the Trump administration, alleging the US government retaliated against the company for refusing to let its Claude AI model be used for autonomous lethal warfare and mass surveillance of Americans.
In the complaint, filed in federal court in San Francisco, Anthropic seeks to have its designation as a national security supply-chain risk declared unlawful and blocked.
Anthropic is the first US company ever to have been publicly punished with such a designation, a label typically reserved for organizations from foreign adversary countries, such as Chinese tech giant Huawei.
The label not only blocks use of the company's technology by the Pentagon, but also requires all defense vendors and contractors to certify that they do not use Anthropic's models in their work with the department.



In this illustration, the Claude AI app is seen in the app store on a phone on February 16, 2026 in New York City.

- AI overhaul -
Microsoft argued in an amicus brief that blacklisting Anthropic was an unprecendented response to a contract dispute that portended ill for the technology sector as well as the U.S. military.
"This is not the time to put at risk the very AI ecosystem that the administration has helped to champion," Microsoft said in the brief.
A temporary restraining order would allow time to avoid disrupting the American military's ongoing use of advanced AI, Microsoft argued.

"Otherwise, Microsoft and other technology companies must act immediately to alter existing product and contract configurations used by Department of War."
"This could potentially hamper US warfighters at a critical point in time."
The row erupted days before the US military strike on Iran.
Anthropic's Claude is the Pentagon's most widely-deployed frontier AI model and the only such model currently operating on its classified systems.❑



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1 BR 1 Bath $265K
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Dakota: Tel.588 7364
San Nicolas:
Centro Medico: Tel.584 5794

OTHER

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Blood Bank Aruba 587 0002
Urgent Care 586 0448
Walk-In Doctor's Clinic
+297 588 0539

EMERGENCY

Police	**100**
Oranjestad	**527 3140**
Noord	**527 3200**
Sta. Cruz	**527 2900**
San Nicolas	**584 5000**
Police Tipline	**11141**
Ambulancia	**911**
Fire Dept.	**115**
Red Cross	**582 2219**

TAXI SERVICES

Taxi Tas	**587 5900**
Prof. Taxi	**588 0035**
Taxi D.T.S.	**587 2300**
Taxi Serv. Aruba	**583 3232**
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TRAVEL INFO

Aruba Airport	**524 2424**
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ARUBA TODAY NEWS

Arctic sea ice among lowest on record: AFP review of U.S. data

Paris, France

Arctic sea ice is headed for one of its smallest winter peaks on record, an AFP review of U.S. data showed Wednesday, as climate change shrinks the region's frozen cover and heightens geopolitical tensions.

Formed when ocean water freezes, Arctic sea ice melts naturally in summer and reforms in winter, but the amount that returns has been declining due to human-induced planetary warming.

The maximum sea ice extent in the Arctic reached nearly 14.22 million square kilometres (5.5 million square miles) on March 10, according to the data from the US National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC).

If the trend continues before winter ends later this month, it would rank among the five smallest ice covers in four decades of satellite monitoring, possibly even breaking last year's record.

While ice has gone down in the last few days, it can still go back up, said Seamus McAfee, an NSIDC spokesman.

"But so far, it is looking like it could be a very significant extent, perhaps one of, if not the lowest, in the record," McAfee told AFP.

This handout photo taken on August 28, 2025, shows Brazilian sailor Tamara Klink during her Arctic voyage through the Northwest Passage, on her sailboat "Sardinha 2" in the remote western region of Nunavut, Canada, near the Beaufort Sea (approx. 70°17'N, 126°32'W).

Last year, Arctic sea ice reached an all-time low on March 22, at 14.31 million square kilometres, according to the NSIDC. Previous lows were set in 2016, 2017 and 2018.

The NSIDC has yet to have an exact date for the 2026 maximum sea ice extent, McAfee said, adding that it would issue a press release once that becomes clearer.

Samantha Burgess, strategic lead for climate at the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts, told AFP that this year would be among the lowest five on record.

Gilles Garric, polar oceanographer at French climate research institute Mercator Ocean Toulouse, said this winter was among the "top three" so far.

"The sirens are blaring that we're headed for a hothouse planet with massive devastation around the world," said Shaye Wolf, climate science director at the Center for Biological Diversity, a US-based environmental group.

- Faster warming -

The last three years have been the hottest globally on record, as rising greenhouse gas emissions drive global warming.

The polar regions are warming faster than the global average, especially the Arctic.

Experts say the warming El Nino weather phenomenon could return later this year, which could send temperatures to new heights.

"Given that the Arctic is warming at 3-4 times the global average rate, we are likely to continue to observe continued Arctic warming, loss of multi-year ice," Burgess told AFP.

The consequences of low winter sea ice could include "potentially faster and more extensive summer melt", she said.

While the Arctic reached a new low, the situation improved in Antarctica as sea ice coverage came closer to its annual summer average after four years of extreme lows, the NSIDC reported on Monday.

Unlike melting land ice such as glaciers or ice sheets, shrinking sea ice does not directly raise ocean levels, but its loss threatens ecosystems.

Many species, including polar bears in the Arctic and emperor penguins in Antarctica, rely on sea ice to breed and feed.

"But Arctic warming, driven by fossil fuels, puts us all in peril," said Wolf.❑

North America 'heat dome' left winners and losers: study

Paris, France

Billions of mussels scorched and baby birds dropping from sweltering nests: North America's 2021 heatwave caused a cascade of ecological damage, some of it catastrophic, some unexpected, a new study showed Wednesday.

The "heat dome" that hit the western United States and Canada, fuelled by human-induced climate change, was among the most extreme ever recorded globally, with temperatures sometimes exceeding 50C.

"The heatwave had widespread ecological effects, including an almost 400-percent increase in wildfire activity and negatively affecting more than three-quarters of the species studied," said study co-author Diane Srivastava, professor at the University of British Columbia.

To assess the heatwave's impact, researchers combined weather, ecological and hydrological data with information on wildfires and scientific models.

Of the 49 terrestrial and marine species studied, over 75 percent were negatively affected, according to the study published in the journal Nature Ecology and Evolution.

A man walks along the National Mall in Washington, DC, July 25, 2025, as a heat dome sits over the region leading to extremely high temperatures.

But the effects were highly variable: some populations fell by nearly 99 percent, while others increased by up to 89 percent.

The variability depends on factors such as vegetation cover, a species' intrinsic heat tolerance and behaviour especially the ability to seek shade.

More than half the thatched barnacle population died as well as 92 percent of Bay mussels.

The number of surf scoters, a native sea duck, dropped by 56 percent while daily camera trap detections of caribou fell by half.

"Basically, any animal that couldn't escape the heat was hard hit by it," said Julia Baum, the lead author and biology professor at the University of Victoria.

"This included mobile animals at vulnerable stages of life, such as baby birds that couldn't yet fly and were trapped in their heat-retaining nests," she said.

Some species thrived.

Sea lettuce benefited from the die-off of other algae and expanded, increasing its coverage on beaches by 65 percent after the heatwave. Moose returned to the same level of daily camera trap sightings after the heatwave as they had before.❑

Brilliant Adebayo scores 83 points, second highest in NBA history

Miami, United States

Bam Adebayo erupted for a jaw-dropping 83 points -- the second highest total in NBA history -- as the Miami Heat thrashed the Washington Wizards 150-129 on Tuesday.

Adebayo's astonishing performance surpassed the 81 points scored by the late Kobe Bryant for the Los Angeles Lakers against Toronto in 2006, and is second only to Wilt Chamberlain's iconic 100-point haul against the New York Knicks in 1962.

Adebayo served notice that a special performance could be on the cards with an electric first quarter, where he poured in 31 points from 10-of-16 shooting.

By half-time he had reached 43 points and he kept the pedal down after the interval with 19 points in the third quarter to take his tally to 62.

At that juncture it became a question of whether Adebayo could threaten Bryant's 20-year-old tally of 81 points.

Bam Adebayo #13 of the Miami Heat shoots a free throw to pass Kobe Bryant for the second most points scored in a NBA game during the fourth quarter against the Washington Wizards at Kaseya Center on March 10, 2026 in Miami, Florida.

Adebayo duly eclipsed that record late in the fourth quarter. Two free throws saw him draw level with Bryant's total, and two more took him to 83 with just over a minute remaining.

That was the cue for Adebayo to be subbed out, leaving the court to a standing ovation from a disbelieving home crowd at Miami's Kaseya Center.

"Man, I wish I could relive it twice," Adebayo said, adding his individual masterpiece would not have been possible without the support of family, fans and his teammates.

"Somebody had to pass me the ball. I appreciate coach for drawing up plays for me and I got it going tonight."

Adebayo admitted he had sensed a historic performance was beckoning after his first-half display, ranking it as the highpoint of his career.

"This is number one, for sure," Adebayo said.

Adebayo also took special satisfaction at surpassing his boyhood idol Bryant's mark of 81.

- 'Surreal moment' -

"It's Wilt, me and then Kobe that sounds crazy," Adebayo said, adding that he had reflected on how Bryant, who died in a helicopter crash in Los Angeles in 2020, would have responded to his performance.

"To me it's wondering what he would say," Adebayo said. "My mind is like 'What would he say to me?' Because I've always wanted to have a conversation with him.

"He'd probably say 'Do it again'. Just a surreal moment being in the company of somebody you idolized growing up."

Miami coach Erik Spoelstra described Adebayo's virtuoso display as "just an absolutely surreal night."

"We've been blessed to have been a part of a lot of big moments in this arena, and this one, it just happened," Spoelstra said.

"I'm grateful that we were all able to witness it."

Spoelstra said Miami had sought to stick to their game plan during Adebayo's 43-point first half, but gradually pivoted towards helping him chase a historic total.

"At half-time we talked about continuing to play our game," Spoelstra said. "In the second half I was a little bit more intentional trying to get him some touches.

"I would say once he got to 50, then we're thinking, all right, let's maybe get to 60. Then when he got to 60, just keep going. Might as well go for 70.

"I didn't even dare think about taking him out of the game at that point. ❑

Italy stun USA to leave hosts on brink at World Baseball Classic

Houston, United States

Italy pulled off a stunning 8-6 upset over the United States in the World Baseball Classic on Tuesday, leaving the star-studded hosts facing possible elimination from the tournament.

Italy whose team is made up mostly of American players with Italian heritage roared into an 8-0 lead after home runs from catcher Kyle Teel, shortstop Sam Antonacci and outfielder Jac Caglianone.

The US rallied in the late innings to set up a nervy finale, but Italy held on to seal a famous win in Houston.

The result means the USA, one of the favourites for the tournament with a team packed with Major League Baseball stars, are now sweating on the outcome of Italy's final Pool B game against Mexico on Wednesday.

A win for unbeaten Italy in that game would see them advance to the last eight along with the United States.

If Mexico beat Italy, three teams will finish the group with a 3-1 record, meaning a complicated tiebreaker system based on runs allowed per defensive out among the tied teams will determine who advances.

In a further twist, USA manager Mark DeRosa had started the day believing his team had already reached the quarter-finals following Monday's win over Mexico.

He admitted later that he had misunderstood the qualification scenarios.

"I misspoke," DeRosa said. "I completely misread the calculations."

Italy's starting pitcher Michael Lorenzen laid the foundation for the upset, muzzling the USA's fearsome batting lineup through four scoreless innings.

At the plate, Italy's sluggers soon began attacking the US pitching, with Teel opening the scoring with a solo home run off Nolan McLean in the second inning.

That was followed by Antonacci's two-run homer to make it 3-0, and the Italians then tacked on again in the fourth with Caglianone's two-run shot making it 5-0.

Three more runs followed in the sixth inning to leave Italy sitting on an 8-0 advantage.

The USA gradually began to fire up in the sixth, with Baltimore Orioles slugger Gunnar Henderson's solo shot making it 8-1, before Pete Crow-Armstrong's three-run shot cut the lead to 8-4. The U.S. added another run in the eighth and Crow-Armstrong homered again in the bottom of the ninth to make it 8-6, before the US rally stalled, with captain Aaron Judge striking out to Greg Weissert to end the game.❑

Sam Antonacci #10 of Team Italy slides safely into second base as the ball gets past Bobby Witt Jr. #7 of Team United States in the sixth inning during the 2026 World Baseball Classic at Daikin Park on March 10, 2026 in Houston, Texas.

Sabalenka powers past Osaka, sets Indian Wells QF clash with Mboko

Indian Wells, United States World number one Aryna Sabalenka powered into the Indian Wells quarter-finals on Tuesday with a statement 6-2, 6-4 victory over former champion Naomi Osaka in a battle of Grand Slam winners.

It was another straightforward, straight-sets victory for Sabalenka, who fired 31 winners with eight aces.

"Overall I'm happy that I put so much pressure on her, that I brought variety today on the court," said Sabalenka, who mixed her booming groundstrokes with effective forays to the net.

"I think she was a little confused in the key moments, and I'm happy to see that," Sabalenka said. "I'm happy that my serve worked well, on the return I played really great tennis."

Aryna Sabalenka stretches for a ball while playing Naomi Osaka of Japan during Day 7 of the BNP Paribas Open at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden on March 10, 2026 in Indian Wells, California.

Sabalenka wrapped up the first set with two breaks of serve before Osaka began to find her rhythm.

But the Japanese star was unable to crack the serve of Sabalenka, who saved both break points she faced in the second set and grabbed a break for 4-3 with a pair of forehand winners. It was just the second meeting between the two, both four-time Grand Slam champions. Osaka won the first back in 2018 on the way to her first major title at the US Open.

"That's actually crazy," Sabalenka said of the fact they haven't met more often. But she predicted there were more clashes in their future as Osaka, now ranked 16th, regains her momentum on the WTA Tour after taking off all of 2023 and having daughter, Shai, in July of that year.

Sabalenka, runner-up at Indian Wells in 2023 and 2025, will continue her pursuit of a first title in the prestigious ATP and WTA Masters 1000 event against 10th-seeded Victoria Mboko.

The 19-year-old Canadian saw off sixth-seeded American Amanda Anisimova 6-4, 6-1 to earn a shot at Sabalenka, who beat her in the fourth round of the Australian Open.

"It was a big eye-opener playing her in the Australian Open," Mboko said. "Hopefully I can hold my ground a bit more against her."

'Completely speechless'

Australian qualifier Talia Gibson's dream run in the California desert continued as she belted 42 winners in a 7-5, 2-6, 6-1 victory over seventh-ranked Italian Jasmine Paolini.

The 21-year-old's first victory over a top-10 player propelled her into her first WTA quarter-final.

She'll face 14th-ranked Czech Linda Noskova, who swept past Alexandra Eala of the Philippines 6-2, 6-0 in just 55 minutes.

Gibson, ranked 112th, used a late break to pocket the first set, closing it out with her 18th winner of the opening frame.

Paolini sped to a 3-0 lead in the second as Gibson's errors mounted and it looked as if the experienced Italian, a two-time Grand Slam finalist, had seized control. ❑